

[Ruby Beach]

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Couch-Life history- Jax-Ruby Beach

Shepherd

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Mrs. [??] (Sloaner) [Scull?]

2112 Main-st.,

Jacksonville,

Florida.

Rose Shepherd, Writer

RUBY BEACH - (Pablo - Jacksonville Beach)

Mrs. [Scull?], aged 78, with a sister, Miss Mary Kennedy, two years her junior, and her daughters Marguerite [Scull?], lives at the above Main Street address, where she operates a rooming house for the accommodation of tourists.

She is a tall thin woman with lively brown eyes, her gray hair showing traces of red, and the clear fine skin that goes with such a combination. As she answered the door, she held in her hand a copy of Marjorie Kinnan Rawling's "The Yearling."

"That's a great book," she remarked, as she laid the volume on the library table in the front hall - "So true to the 'cracker' life and customs. And I remember the storm she tells about.

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"You sit here on the couch," she directed me to long sofa of the three piece cane-back living room suite in the hall," and I'll sit beside you. I am a little hard of hearing, but you just ask me what you want to know and we'll get along fine. My father always said my tongue was tied in the middle and rattled at both ends," she laughed, "so it's no trouble for me to talk once I get started.

"My father, D. H. Kennedy, was a Civil Engineer and surveyor. He had been engaged in doing surveying work for a new railroad being put through the state of Indiana. He was originally from Delaware and my mother from Virginia. The cold weather of the middle west was very hard for her to bear. I remember she had been ill when 2 one day the doctor said she could not stand another Indiana winter. It was in February, 1875, and 20[?] below zero. We children had just come in from skating on a nearby creek, where the water was frozen solid. Father had been considering going west, which was building up in those days, and had already started selling off the household goods and other things preparatory to making the change. It was Saturday. As the doctor left he handed my father a roll of newspaper, which my father very gingerly opened, the wrappings in a thick layer of pasteboard disclosing a big, ripe, red strawberry.

"Did Bob Overton send this?" father asked the doctor.

"Yes, it came in this morning's mail."

"Well, if they grow strawberries in Florida like this in the month of February, that's where we are going instead of out west."

"The following tuesday we let Indianapolis for Florida. So you may say it was a big red strawberry that induced us to come. My father lived in Jacksonville for twenty years afterwards, passing away at the age of 76. My mother lived forty ears longer, she too dying at 76. There was 19 years difference in their ages.

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"I went to public schools here, later attending a private school kept by a Mrs. Smith on the corner of Ocean and Duval Streets where the Seneca Hotel now is. A good many pupils were girls.

"My husband, William E. scull, came here from Ohio in 1872. We were married in 1879.

"We built our home in the country in the [Lackawanna?] Springs section of what is now Edison Avenue, and lived there for 44 years. But the Atlantic Coast Line shops were established in that section, my husband became dissatisfied, so many cheap houses went up 3 in the neighborhood, the children were bad and troublesome. So we sold the place and built another home in the 1400 block on Edgewood which I still own. But Mr. Scull died [?] twelve years ago, the depression came on, there was not too much money, and I decided to run a tourist home, so bought this location three years ago. I like the business, not only as a livelihood, but because it is so interesting and brings me in contact with people from all over the country. I wish, though, people would stay longer than a week.

"Did you see those three boys on the porch as you came in? Well, they are from Haverhill, Massachusetts, where they attend a preparatory school, and have spent their Easter holidays in Florida, their first visit to this state. They have a small car and have almost worn it out 'burning up the Florida highways,' trying to see everything in such a short time. Tomorrow morning at 4 o'clock they leave for home. They have been most interesting, and I have enjoyed having them here.

"In 1886 Mr. F. F. L'Engle had charge of surveying the railroad right of way to the beach. He took my father as his assistant. My husband was also a civil engineer and surveyor, so in order to [??] the scene of action, we closed our [Lackawanna?] home, bought a tent and went to the beach, where wee lived for four years.

"Our oldest baby was about a year and a half old. She was so welcome and so precious that we had a hard time finding a name for her, so finally settled on the name of Ruby.

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"When we went to the beach in October, 1884, the town had been laid out, and wanting to honor our little girl, we named the settlement Ruby Beach. Later we opened and operated the postoffice there, and it was known also as Ruby Postoffice.

"Our little daughter was born in 1882, and is now Mrs. Ruby 4 [Searby?], of [Wanblee?], (Indian South Dakota. She is a fine, splendid woman, and has always been a precious jewel of a daughter.

"At the time we went to the beach, our second little daughter, Bessie, was only six weeks old.

"At first the mail came to Mayport, and had to be brought over by the horse and buggy route, Mr. Scull driving over [?] the beach. In the spring of 1885, the first train was run to the beach, and it was then we established the postoffice with a weekly service to and from Jacksonville, calling the post office 'Ruby.' After the railroad was completed and patronage established to warrant a daily schedule, the railroad company, known as the Jacksonville and beach Railway, changed the name to 'San Pablo,' which was later known simply as 'Pablo Beach,' and with daily mail service, the postoffice also became known as Pablo.

"In 1884 we built the first house at the beach. It is still standing and has been known for several years as the 'Dixie House.' It was built of lumber from a beached vessel.

"In the spring of 1884, a German [barque?], the ' [Millias?], loaded with mahogany sprang a leak as it neared Bayport and the officers thought it was going to sink. To avert this disaster they beached it this side of the mouth of the river. The memory of the ship as it struck the beach with all sails set about 4 o'clock in the afternoon with the background of the late afternoon sun remains as one of the prettiest sights I have ever seen. It was loaded with all mahogany lumber. Dr. John C. L'Engle bought a lot of it, and after the ship struck, the remainder washed overboard. This my husband gathered up, lightered on two rafts up the river to Pablo Creek, from there he had it hauled to our beach lot. A big wind

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struck the second lighter, washing it out in the river so one load 5 was all he was able to salvage. Thus it was that our home, the 'Dixie House', has sills and underpinning of solid mahogany, and the outside contains the best hardwood lumber it was possible to secure at that time. The interior of the house was badly damaged by fire last summer, but an examination showed the outside, the sills and underpinning had not suffered at all. The present owner has been advised to wreck the building for the valuable material that it contains, but this she refuses to do.

"When the railroad was completed in [1880?], the first lumber shipped to the beach was for the construction of the Murray Hall Hotel owned by Mr. John [?] Christopher, of Jacksonville. It was not completed until 1886. The Murray Hall was beautifully furnished and equipped and had the reputation of being the finest hotel on the Atlantic coast. It was open the year round and enjoyed a fine clientele, but its popularity suffered for lack of proper advertising, as well as its inaccessibility; it was a long trip to the ocean front, there was no amusement of any kind, and people did not like to just come down in the woods; visitors preferred to remain in Jacksonville. The hotel was completely destroyed by fire in 1891. Mrs. Christopher who assisted her husband in its operation was a very fine intelligent business woman, but she said it was a blessing it burned, as the patronage at no time approximated the expense of operation and that Mr. Christopher lost considerable money in its four years' existence. A big deep artesian well furnished the water supply for the hotel and for a considerable time after the fire the water would spout tow to three hundred feet in the air, spraying down like a fountain.

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"From the time we went to the beach in October, 1884, until February, 1885, we were the only family there. Then a family built a small house and located in the woods about a mile south. Another family lived at what is now Neptune Beach, two miles north.

"We had two tents - one in which we lived and the other in which we kept store. For two years I never saw a white woman's face. The men would come to the store for supplies,

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and as they bought sugar by the 100-lb sack, flour by the barrel, sides of meat and bacon, they did not come often. A rather amusing thing was that those early settlers at the beach lived mostly on fish, yet we did a big business in canned salmon and sardines. We often laughed at the demand for canned fish.

“Adjoining the living tent was a palmetto kitchen, and when it rained I had to cook enough food for several days to last until the skies cleared again. One day when it was raining, Mr. F. F. L'Engle had dinner with us, and he asked my husband why he did not put a tight roof on the kitchen. My husband replied: ““Well, when it's raining, I can't; and when it's dry we don't need it.””

“The first winter was glorious, and how we did enjoy it. We were all so well and happy. The winter of 1885, however, was cold. But then we had built the house, [??] did not notice the cold either. One cold day it was freezing and my husband says; ““The Lord wants to freeze something, why don't you fix up some icecream?”” I did, putting the container in a barrel of water which froze and we had ice cream.

“When we first went to the beach it took two hours to drive to the boat landing at Mayport and three more to make the trip to Jacksonville up the St. Johns River. The steamboat bringing mail and supplies from Jacksonville at that time was the Katy Spencer in charge of Captain Napoleon Broward, afterwards governor of Florida.

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“There was a way by which Mr. Scull used to drive to Jacksonville by going six miles south through the Palm Valley section where there was a settlement, but it took two days to make the trip, so that one night he had to camp out. There was no way to cross Pablo Creek except to ford it, and that was the reason they had to go such a roundabout way in order to reach near the source of the stream where it was narrow and shallow. Dr. Burroughs had an orange grove in the Palm Valley section, and he used to drive that route

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too, and sometimes he and Mr. Scull would make the trip together. There is still quite a bit of ocean front between Jacksonville and St. Augustine which has been slow in developing.

"In 1884 the company had an auction sale of lots at the beach. People were brought down from Jacksonville on the steamer, Katie Spencer to Mayport, and landing carriages were waiting to drive them to Pablo Beach. About 100 persons took advantage of this early 'real estate excursion,' and many lots were sold. Then, as now, the wonderful hard-packed smooth sand beach was an almost unbelievable reality to these norther tourists. The company had previously permitted us to select our own lot, and our new home was well under way. "In the fall of [1886?] General F. E. Spinner, United States Treasurer during the period of the War between the States, came down to the beach with his two daughters, Mrs. Shoemaker and Mrs. Moore. They had two or three tents in which they spent the winter, and the next year they built a cottage there. This cottage was moved around the corner from the Casa Marina [?] that hotel was built a few years ago. I came to know General Spinner and his daughters very well, as they took their meals with me the first year they were at the beach.

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"In the spring of 1886 there was a violent windstorm. Tents were blown down and people's belongings scattered about. There was quite a village there then, as a number of people were living there, and a lot of mechanics and other workers engaged in building were also accommodated in tents. People came flocking to our house for shelter until it was filled to overflowing, but my husband assured them they were welcome and would be safe, as he knew the house was well built and would withstand the severest storms. It has stood many storms since then and is still in good condition.

"I do not know from whom the railroad company putting in the first road secured the land, but it was purchased with the idea of establishing a summer resort for the people of Jacksonville. At first everybody had to cross the river on the ferry at Jacksonville and take the [?] from the south side. The first road was a narrow-gauge. Later the Florida East

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Coast Railway took over this line, making it a broad-guage road, extending it to a [?] at Mayport, and building the bridge across the St. Johns which made it much better traveling.

“The first road had excursions on Sundays for white people. This was in [1885?]. On Mondays the colored people had their excursion, and great black clouds of them would roll in. Thursdays was another special-rate day for the white people, and thus the beach was popularized.

“In 1876 Mayport was quite a thriving village. There was a hotel there, The Atlantic House, and a row of cottages along the beach.

“In 1881 the government started building the jetties at the mouth of the St. Johns River. This widening and deepening of 9 the channel caused the water to wash with gret force behind the jetties. The summer cottages were washed into the ocean. The Atlantic House was moved back twice, the last time, away back on a high beach where the jetties started, but finally it, too, was washed away. After the jetties were completed, that section filled up with soil, and no doubt in time there will be trees there on the Mayport side.

“Were the mosquitoes bad in the early days? No, we did not notice them. Everybody had nets over the beds, and if the breeze came in from the ocean, we did not notice them at all, but if there was a land breeze, the mosquitoes and gnats were annoying.

“The second house at the beach was built by Mr. and Mrs. Dickerson. They had a store and she was afterwards postmistress. In September, 1886, the postoffice was moved to the Murray Hall Hotel, and Mr. French, who was the manager, acted as postmaster. This arrangement was not satisfactory. The guests at the hotel objected to the riff-raff then at the beach coming into this splendid hotel for mail, Mr. French thought it took up too much of his time, and the people themselves did not like the arrangement. After the hotel burned, it was established in a store up town.

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"I forgot to say, the railroad company built a pavilion at the terminus in the first period, and it had a skating rink which was quite popular, both with the excursionists and the people at the hotel and the beach residents.

"After four years, Mr. Scull's mother who lived in Riverside insisted on our bringing the children to stay with her, which we did, and we were sick the whole time. We missed the outdoor life, and the fresh clean air from the ocean. We afterwards went 10 to our own home in Lackawanna when Mr. Scull's work with the railroad terminated, and only spent [?] at the beach.

"In the early 1890's the Burnside Hotel was built at the beach, and there were four cottages nearby. We spent part of one summer in one of these cottages and Mr. [???] and his wife from South Jacksonville had one of the neighboring cottages at Burnside Beach, as it was called. This hotel and the four cottages later were swept into the ocean, even the land where they stood is gone.

"Of course the jetties were a necessity to deep water for shipping, but I often wonder if the jetties and the new seawalls recently built will not in time destroy the fine driving on the beach by causing the sand to drift in behind the jetties and the washing of the water to make rough places along the shore.

"There was a family by the name of Howard bought a lot of land and located up in the Neptune section. They had one son, Alonzo, who was quite a character. He used to drink a lot. I remember one summer we spent at the beach, Alonzo came driving over for supplies with his team of slow mules. We could see him for a long way off, the mules plodding along on the beach with the old rickety wagon, and alonzo humped over on the seat. He got his supplies, including a lot of red liquor, so he was pretty drunk when he left for Neptune. When he arrived home, his mother went out and unhitched the mules, leaving him snoring in the wagon-bed. In time he roused up, calling out: ""If I'm 'Lonzo, I've lost a couple of mules; and if I ain't 'Lonzo, I've got somebody's wagon.""

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"About this time an Englishman built a grand home and put out a fine vineyard along the banks of Pablo Creek, just before you came to the railroad. The creek near here made a perfect 's' so it was necessary to bridge the railroad across it three times.

"Right near this double curve was an old Indian mound that, to my knowledge, has never been excavated.

It was great / fun in the early days to take our friends and relatives from the middle west in bathing at the beach. They would want to go in at any time, being accustomed at home to swimming in small streams, rivers or quiet lakes, and when I would say, 'The tide is not right - we'll have to wait' - they could not understand. Then when we would go at low tide and a few hours later they would see the waves four feet over the spot where they had gone in, they could hardly understand it. Of course, visitors from the north and east, Massachusetts and the other New England states, where the tide goes from six to twenty-four feet at flood time, were not so hard to convince.

"I remember the first yellow fever epidemic in 1877, and the one in 1888, when we refugeed for several months to a camp on Big Pottsburg Creek. My father was on the Board of Health at the time and was on quarantine duty at Key West.

"One day my husband came to Jacksonville for supplies at the height of the epidemic, and when he returned I asked if he had brought a late paper. He said he had been in such a hurry he forgot it. I gave him a terrible tongue-lashing, as I was anxious to learn the latest news of the plague and those affected. A few days later word was sent to me that my mother had been very ill with the yellow fever, but was now on the road to recovery. The day my husband had 'forgotten to buy a paper' her name was published among those stricken, and this was his way of not permitting me to be alarmed. My sister, Mary, who is here with me, helped take care of her. There was a nurse, but Mary was afraid to trust her at night, so she slept with my mother, so as to be at hand when she was needed. One day, Dr. Wiley, president of the board of health, who had come to Jacksonville to

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take charge of the situations said: ""Mary, your mother is very ill. You must not come in the room. The surest way possible for you to get the fever is to / go near hear bed."" Mary said, ""Doctor, I've slept there two nights, and I am all right."" He was astonished, but of course, we did not know then that yellow fever was carried by mosquitoes, and it so happened that my sister was one of those fortunate people whom mosquitoes never bothered. There are some, you know, who are immune, their system having a lot of natural sulphur which keeps the mosquitos away.

"I believe one reason we were all so healthy at beach was the good water we had. The railroad corporation the very first thing drilled a well. It was three hundred feet deep and it was said to cost \$4.00 a foot to drill, but the water was splendid. The well is still there in the square back of where the Red Cross Life Saving station now is, near the miniature railroad.

"When we first came to Jacksonville, everybody had a dug well in their back yard, but in 1879 the city drilled the artesian well that was the beginning of the Jacksonville waterworks, right in its present location."

At this time the noise of an airplane attracted Mrs. Scull's attention.

"Isn't it wonderful," she said as she listened while the droning of the engine died away," what wonderful things we have now, compared with the primitive life we used to lead in Florida?

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"My daughter, Marguerite - (we called here Marguerite because she was such a dainty baby and had such a small flower-like face, and we did not fancy the name of 'Daisy') - left by plane last night for washington and will complete the journey of over a thousand miles in less time than it used to take us in the 1880's to make the slow trip to Jacksonville from the beach.

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"Marguerite is my youngest daughter, and while in Washington will visit my son, William Edward Scull II, a government accountant. He has a son, William Edward III, and thus we perpetuate the name of my devoted husband.

"My third daughter, Eleanor, named for me, would have been the first white child born at the beach, but my old nurse had died the year before, and I was unable to [?] another to come to the beach, so Eleanor was born in Jacksonville in the early part of 1886. She is now Mrs. William Bours Young and lives on Doctor's Lake in the Orange Park District.

"I have always wanted to go up in an airplane. A few years ago, while we were spending the summer at the beach, a commercial aviator would take off from Neptune Beach, making the round trip to Jacksonville Beach and return for [\$15.00?]. The only thing that kept me on the ground was the lack of the [\$15.00?]," she said, laughing.

A huckster came up on the porch with a large bucket of blackberries.

"Blackberries in April? Where are they from, and how much?" she queried.

"From my place in [Mandarin?]. I am selling them at 15 cents a quart," said the huckster.

"Well, I'll just have to have a quart."

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The purchase made and the berries taken care of in the electric refrigerator, Mrs. Scull returned, and the conversation was resumed.

"Another time I was out [?] the local airport and an aviator was taking passengers up for \$10.00, but it was cloudy and I thought it would not be any use, as I would not be able to see much. Sometime everything is going to be just right, and I'll get my airplane trip yet.

"No, I am sorry I do not have any papers or early records relating to Jacksonville and the beach history. In our home in Lackawanna we had a store-room over the kitchen - a large

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light room, in which I had old trunks and boxes stored with keepsakes, among them many old clippings and papers which would be valuable today. But we had three fires while living in that house, one a disastrous one which took the roof off the store-room. It was thought fire was set by sparks from a defective flus / . Everything in the room was ruined - things not totally destroyed by fire were so badly damaged by the water poured in to put out the fire that we were unable to salvage anything. I have not even a picture of the beach or Jacksonville in the early days."